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On the Motivations of Counter-Spy

To the Editor:

The assassination of Richard S. Welch was a tragic and senseless event that should be condemned by civilized people everywhere. By now it should be clear that terrorism and assassination are wrong regardless of who is involved.

I am concerned, however, that this event will be used as an excuse to avoid a serious re-evaluation of U. S. intelligence activities and to attack its critics, including Congress and the press. At the present time, my concerns are focused on the allegation that the identification of Mr. Welch in a recent issue of Counter-Spy contributed to his death.

This is a serious charge. I doubt that it can be supported in terms of rational and logical argument, let alone substantiated with hard facts. But it is a question that can and should be resolved with empirical evidence rather than rhetoric. Thus, I encourage the full and responsible exploration of the allegation by both the Government and the press.

To do less allows the shadow of the accusation to be forever cast upon the judgment, credibility and motivations of the Counter-Spy staff. Without doubt there are those who would be more than satisfied with this result.

I doubt that truth would be well served by this outcome.

Members of the Counter-Spy staff have been seriously concerned about abuses of the U. S. intelligence community—both foreign and domestic—long before the current upsurge of interest in this problem. Because of their efforts to investigate and expose abuses they have experienced disbelief, social isolation and probably harassment, all of which could have turned them into blind critics.

Throughout their activities, however, they have attempted to maintain a balanced approach which recognized a significant need for legitimate intelligence operations. In short, they have opposed abuses but have definitely not tried to destroy the capabilities of the intelligence community.

Thus, they have conducted themselves as responsible investigators who are concerned for the welfare of the individuals they investigate as well as the validity of the information they report. Given their own efforts in this direction it would be unfortunate if the reputation of the Counter-Spy staff were to be destroyed by unsubstantiated charges. RALPH G. LEWIS

East Lansing, Mich., Jan. 14, 1976

The writer is on the advisory board of Counter-Spy.